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CUBAN CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS

BY

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ABSTRACT

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TITLE: Cuban Civil-Military Relations

FORMAT: Strategy Research Project

DATE: 7 April 1997 PAGES: 23 CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

In 1959 Castro dismantled the Cuban Army and established from the bottom up a revolutionary army and militia to support the new government. For at least 20 years the army and the party thought as one. Beginning in 1980, cracks in the system began to develop when Castro changed the military's doctrine and organization. Problems continue today with the military seeking a viable mission in a time of severe economic constraint.

Huntington, Janowitz and Moskos have written a great deal on civil-military relation theories. Applying these theories to Cuba can provide us a better understanding of Cuban civil-military relations the last 38 years and insights into future relations.

Future civil-military relations will be looked at based on a number of possible scenarios. As the economic and political situation in Cuba continues to precipitously decline will the military continue to support the government, throw their support behind an alternative party or will they split their support behind competing factions?

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G. Pope Atkins once said that:

The role of the Cuban military is presently in flux and difficult to assess. The regular army was destroyed by Castro in 1959, and a revolutionary "party" army and militia were substituted; but, as Needler notes (Latin American Politics in Perspective, pp. 64-65), it remains to be seen how long the "new army" will remain without a separate corporate identity with divergent outlooks from the revolutionary government.¹

That was written in 1974. Today there is a myriad of information about Cuban civil-military relations to analyze patterns of behavior the last 38 years. The purpose of this paper is threefold: 1. to analyze Cuban civil-military relations and determine whether patterns of military thought and behavior exist that diverge from the civilian leadership structure; 2. to evaluate Cuban civil-military relations in terms of the theoretical models provided by experts in the field like Huntington, Moskos, and Janowitz; and 3. to present scenarios for future relations between the civilian leadership and the military.

GENERAL THEORIES OF CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS

In 1957 Samuel Huntington wrote The Soldier and the State, which has been considered the bible for civil-military relations the last 40 years. In this treatise, Huntington argues that the military should be protected from the influence of civilian society. Such influence would undermine military order and detract soldiers from their main area of responsibility, warfighting. He proposes that a military force that remains untainted by civilian society is the best way to guarantee the checks and balances necessary to insure civilian control.²

In sum, Huntington is a strong proponent of a professional military dedicated solely to warfighting, with virtually no participation in the political arena. Ideally, the military should be

isolated from civilian communities to minimize its involvement with local economic, social and political problems. Today, Huntington would be very skeptical of using the military for peacekeeping, humanitarian and other nontraditional roles.

In contrast, Morris Janowitz, author of The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait (1960), believes the army should be a “citizen army” that encompasses the full spectrum of society. He argues that when the military is fully integrated into society, civilian control of the military has its best chance for success. Under Janowitz’s model, officers are commissioned from civilian universities, live in communities and attend the same churches, schools, medical facilities and shopping locations that civilians attend.³ Janowitz believes that the military should be readily used to combat economic and social problems, both domestically and internationally. For example, under Janowitz’s model, not only should the military be used for peacekeeping and humanitarian operations but also for education, health and law enforcement problems since they have expertise in these areas.

In 1971 Charles Moskos wrote an article, entitled “Armed Forces and American Society: Convergence or Divergence?” in which he argued that the answer to the civil-military dilemma can be found somewhere in the middle between Huntington and Janowitz. Moskos believes there are numerous areas where the military can be integrated with civilian society as well as areas where traditional distinctions should remain in place. He agrees with Janowitz that the military should follow the citizen soldier concept and be more representative of society than Huntington’s homogeneous, separate military. In his view, there are some economic and social problems that the military could be called upon to help resolve.⁴ However, the most difficult

aspect of this is doing it without eroding the military's primary mission of fighting and winning wars.

Contemporary decision-makers and theorists have also discussed approaches as to what nontraditional roles the military should be called upon to perform. In the United States, former Senator Sam Nunn believes the military is a critical resource supported by the people and as such should be used to combat economic and social ills. In his view, these are just as much a threat to a country's welfare as the military threats of an enemy power.⁵ On the other hand, Charles Dunlap, author of "The Origins of the American Military Coup of 2012," is skeptical of the military expanding beyond traditional boundaries for fear that its war fighting capabilities will be significantly eroded. He writes that: "When the military was obliged to engage in a bewildering array of nontraditional duties to further justify its existence, it is little wonder that its traditional apolitical professionalism eroded."⁶

TOTALITARIAN VARIANT

The above theories are primarily concerned with western democracies. However, they are also applicable to Cuba as long as we are conscious of the differences in civil-military relations between western democracies and totalitarian, Communist states. In authoritarian regimes, internal security is often a major mission of the military. Militaries in such regimes normally are heavily involved in the political process, while in democracies this involvement is minimal.⁷ In totalitarian societies, in particular, the economic, political and military systems are inextricably linked. Looking at democratic societies, it is generally easier to draw a line between the military and the political leadership.

Over the years, many attempts have been made to come up with a viable model for civil-military relations in Communist states. One of the more popular ones has been provided by Jonathan Adelman who argues that:

The nature of revolutionary development and degree of external Soviet interference have been decisive factors in determining the nature of Communist civil-military relations. Taken as our point of departure the literature on revolution developed by Huntington, Johnson, Wolf, Tucker, and others, we argue that the path to power has significantly determined the nature of civil-military relations in the first two decades after the seizure of power.⁸

According to Adelman's theory, Communist states can be broken down into 3 categories: those in which the military has a strong political role, those in which the role of the military in the political arena is small, and those where the military has a small but increasing political role.⁹ Cuba would fall into the first category. Unlike other communist regimes, the military came into existence before the revolution and was the only organization capable of assuming political leadership in the years immediately after Castro's triumph. The Cuban Communist Party eventually grew out of that organization.¹⁰ As much as this provides comparative insights into communist regimes, analyzing Cuban civil-military relations in terms of theories normally attributed to western democracies will provide even deeper insights and help illustrate some possibilities for the future.

CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS, 1959 - 1970

The relationship between the Communist Party and the armed forces has always been very different in Cuba than other Communist regimes. Unlike the Soviet Union, Castro's army (at least the guerrilla nucleus) was formed 2 years before he actually came to power. Unlike other communist regimes, it was much more difficult to draw a line between the Party and the

military, at least until 1970. During the formative years of the Castro regime, the armed forces filled the role of a political organization as well as a military one. They were intimately involved with the administrative affairs of running the state and the policies of supporting the revolution. By 1965 an embryonic Communist Party structure had been developed that was capable of assuming the role of running the state.¹¹

As the Party organization slowly developed during the 1960s, conflict arose between the military and the Party. In 1961 Castro introduced political instructors into the military to educate the troops on the ideals and goals of the Cuban revolution. Although the political instructor worked for the unit commander (it was not a dual system), conflicts developed due to the zealotness of some instructors who viewed their role similar to that of the commissar system in the Soviet Union.¹² In 1963 the armed forces won a victory when political instructors were given more military duties at the expense of their political duties. Shortly afterwards, a party organization was introduced into the military system in consonance with the party system that was finally beginning to develop in the civilian sector. Initially, this organization within the armed forces was loosely formed with no link to the civilian Party organization and had severe limitations placed on it. The primary loyalty of its members was still to the unit commander.¹³ In 1970, after the military failed to achieve its assigned goal of producing 10 million tons of sugar, more separate and distinct roles began to develop between the military and the Party, which resulted in a degradation of the former's influence.¹⁴

As a result, the political organization within the military was given more liberal guidelines for conducting political meetings and criticism sessions, and developed a separate link

to the civilian Party organization. By 1974 it was recognized that the political mission of this organization was as important as its military mission.¹⁵

During this early period, the Cuban military was more closely aligned to the Janowitz model of civil-military relations. The military was the only viable organizational entity with the professional expertise to run the administrative, political, and social functions of the state. Its responsibilities and influence were all encompassing. However, as the functions of the state expanded to meet the growing social and economic demands of society, the military began to lose its ability to deal with the state's problems while simultaneously maintaining military effectiveness.

Military proficiency and professionalism were high during the early years of the Castro regime up until about 1966.¹⁶ Survival was the primary interest during this period; everything else was secondary. The military increased its proficiency and retained its edge in bringing down the Batista government, fighting dissidents, defeating the Cuban refugees during the Bay of Pigs fiasco, and preparing for a US invasion which was considered imminent in those days. However, as the threat to the survival of the state dissipated by the mid-60s, the armed forces found themselves saddled with trying to resolve the economic and social expectations of society. Military professionalism no doubt suffered as more and more manpower and resources went into the social and economic sphere with mixed results. With Castro's program of exporting the Cuban Revolution in ruins from 1967 onward, the military's reputation as an effective instrument for combating the ills and problems of the state began to rapidly deteriorate. By 1970, the civilian state apparatus that had been increasing its authority and effectiveness began to assume more of the responsibilities for leading and administering the state.

CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS, 1970 - 1980

As the Communist Party began to assume many of the state's administrative and political functions, the military's role in the international arena began to increase dramatically, strengthening the professionalism of the military as a viable fighting force. During the 1970s, Cuba became much more involved in the international arena, increasing support for national liberation movements in Africa. With thousands of Cuban soldiers being deployed worldwide (most especially Ethiopia and Angola) to participate in wars of national liberation, military proficiency and professionalism once more became high priorities. The Cuban military enhanced its warfighting capabilities, modernized its forces with extensive Soviet equipment and acquired an international reputation as an effective fighting force. The military was relieved of much of its participation in economic and social activities, with the Youth Labor Army assuming many of these functions.

The Party continued to increase its influence within the armed forces. The principle of criticism and self-criticism received greater emphasis. Political education became the primary function of the party apparatus within the military, where previously it had been centered around mobilization and support to the military commander.¹⁷

As the 1970s came to a close, certain trends in relations between the military and the civilian leadership became more apparent. Personnel who had previously held prominent positions in the military and had transferred to the civilian administration had effectively established a separate civilian bureaucracy.¹⁸ The Party was now competing with the military for scarce funding and privileges, and the military was acquiring additional resources for the Angolan Civil War.¹⁹ The military's role within the Central Committee had precipitously

declined and so had the public's positive perception of the army and compulsory military service. However, military skills and mobilization were once again being emphasized over political education due to increasing Cuban military commitments around the world.²⁰

This is probably the only period in the Castro regime's history when civil-military relations comes closest to the Huntington model (albeit remaining within the Moskos model). The blending of the civilian and military sides ceased, as both institutions carved out separate and distinct roles for themselves and proceeded to develop within those spheres. The Party increased its control over society to the point where its apparatus within the military became much more subservient to the national Party organization. As noted above, political education took on a higher priority, and the party and military began to more openly compete for influence, power and scarce resources.²¹

In analyzing this era, I was initially tempted to categorize it within the Huntington model rather than the Moskos model. Superficially, it would appear to the casual observer that the military and civilian spheres had become completely separated with virtually no cross-involvement. However, this was never quite the case. The military still retained considerable influence (albeit less than previously) and authority in political and economic matters. They were less represented within the Central Committee, but still more so than any other Communist country.²²

CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS, 1980-1990

On 1 May 1980, Castro announced that a territorial troop militia (MTT) encompassing 1.5 million people would be established. This was a major change in Cuban military doctrine

and organization and would be based on the "war of all people" concept. The Ministry of the Interior (MININT), rather than the military, assumed the responsibility of running the MTT, and the Party was also given responsibilities in this area at the local levels.²³

As the 1980s progressed, the military's power and image were further damaged by their poor performance during the U.S. invasion of Grenada, and the defeat of the causes they supported when the Sandinistas were defeated at the polls in Nicaragua and the Noriega government was overthrown in Panama. At the same time, there seemed to be no successful end to the military's involvement in Ethiopia and Angola. By the late 1980s, Soviet military assistance and support to Cuba dwindled as the Soviets had economic and political problems of their own.²⁴

As export revenues declined, and Cuba was unable to secure additional loans due to its high foreign debt, the military was once again called on to incorporate western business practices into military industries and later into civilian enterprises.²⁵ The military was also used to support Castro's Turquino Plan which was designed to improve living conditions and economic prospects in the rural mountainside, and reduce the number of poor flocking to overcrowded cities. As the 1980s came to a close, the military was establishing its own businesses (to include tourism agencies) to bring in more Western revenue for the state.²⁶

In 1989, as Cuban troops began to withdraw from Angola and return home, Castro did away with the independence of the MININT, which had been responsible for internal security and law enforcement. Charging that the agency had been involved in drug trafficking, he subordinated its functions to the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR), effectively eliminating personnel he considered a threat to him.²⁷

In July 1989, three MININT officers were executed and nine sentenced for up to 30 years in prison for drug trafficking and contraband activities; 2 FAR officers were executed and imprisoned for the same offense. In September, the Minister of the Interior and six senior MININT officers were sentenced for up to 20 years for negligence in permitting the drug trafficking and contraband to occur.²⁸

Castro replaced the Minister of the Interior and dismissed MININT officers, replacing them with other prominent military officers. One of the 3 military men executed was General Arnaldo Ochoa, a hero of the revolution and the campaigns in Africa. There has been much speculation concerning the arrest, trial and execution of Ochoa. Ochoa may have been Castro's pawn in a much larger game. Some believe that public disclosure of Cuba's involvement with the drug trade had become embarrassing, and that he needed an issue to divert the people from their declining economic plight as well as give him a forum to be viewed as a bastion for anti-corruption.²⁹ Another proposal is that a group of dissident officers existed within the army that threatened Fidel or Raul, though no evidence to date has been discovered about a "macrofaction".³⁰

Though it appears that junior and mid-grade officers thought Ochoa had been dealt with too harshly, there does not seem to have been any major internal problems over this incident. However, after their defections to the United States in 1987, Air Force General Rafael Del Pino and Interior Ministry Major Florintino Azpillaga stated that there had been plots against the Castro government within those 2 agencies. However, these claims have never been corroborated.³¹

As the 1980s came to a close, the military had peaked as far as being a professional force and was already on the decline. As the economy started to decline precipitously, Castro again looked to the military to shore up his failing economic program and political regime. With

eroding economic conditions in the military, an unpopular war in Angola still continuing, coupled with dissatisfaction over the Ochoa affair, there may have been enough internal dissent to pose a threat to the state. The problem is that it would have taken a popular leader with the initiative of an Ochoa to capitalize on the situation. The junior to mid-grade officers that joined the military in the mid-1960s were bought up through the system after the Cuban Revolution and schooled in Soviet tactics, techniques and doctrine. Soviet doctrine does not emphasize individual initiative. Such a trait would be more readily identifiable with a military leader who came to power with Castro during the revolution. On the other hand, those individuals were also likely to be more loyal to him.

By 1989, the Cuban military had clearly moved back closer to the Janowitz model, becoming more involved again with the economic and political responsibilities of the state. As troops began withdrawing from Africa and subsequently from the military as well, professionalism would once again start to decline in favor of civilian pursuits. However, this decline would not be drastic due to a military reserve system that was instrumental in refreshing at least the basic skills.

CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS, 1990 TO THE PRESENT

By 1992, Cuba had lost 70% of its previous purchasing power and imports had fallen from \$8 billion in 1989 to 2 billion in 1992. A precipitous decline in gasoline, food, and clothing had drastically reduced the people's standard of living.³² These economic hard times prompted by the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the inability of the Cuban economy to compete with western markets significantly changed the nature of the military. Not only was the military

budget drastically cut, but it lost half its forces through cutbacks, retirements and reduced conscription terms. The little money that was available was diverted to the production of spare parts to maintain some of the older equipment.³³ With the return of all troops from Angola by 1991 and the elimination of military advisory missions worldwide, thousands of former soldiers were pushed into the Cuban economy to compete for fewer available jobs.

Though the military has frequently been involved in economic matters since 1959, Castro by 1991 began to introduce it into the civilian economy in an unprecedented manner. It became increasingly involved in agriculture, manufacturing and the service sectors.³⁴

Besides making major contributions to the civilian economic sector, the military also tried to improve readiness by operating more efficiently and incorporating more western business and managerial practices. Command and control within the services were improved and streamlined, and more military equipment stored in tunnels to better withstand the climate and an initial enemy attack. Greater efforts have also gone into the production of basic military items such as ammunition and rifles, and reservists and civilians have been more widely incorporated into military drills and exercises.³⁵

While the integration of the military with the civilian sector has contributed to the economy, it has also led to a degradation of military skills. A severe lack of fuel and equipment has almost shut down aviation, armor, artillery and mechanized training. Only basic, rudimentary infantry skills are still consistently being maintained.³⁶ Cuba's conventional forces could do little damage in the event of a US invasion, but the military probably would be capable of defending against an invasion by Cuban American exiles or another Latin American country.³⁷

In summary, Castro has taken a number of measures over the last 8 years to insure that civil-military relations remain relatively stable. He has involved the armed forces in military and civilian enterprises that have kept the institution somewhat productive during the economic crisis. He has also been able to politically manipulate the current crisis with the United States over the Helms-Burton Act to convince the Cuban people that the US threat is still real. Additionally, Castro has been careful not to directly use the military to put down local disturbances. He has made a point of using only the police for this function.³⁸

Despite the problems Cuba is facing, nationalism still remains high, as does fear of the Cuban American exiles.³⁹ US policies like the Helms-Burton Act help fuel Castro's support. As long as he is able to blame the United States for Cuba's economic woes, many people will continue to support both him and the armed forces.

THE FUTURE OF CUBAN CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS

Morale is low in the military for the reasons mentioned above, and this is not likely to change in the near future. The military would probably like to see more trends toward market liberalism that would improve the economic capability of society, including military readiness. However, what the military does not want is a democracy that would mean the return of the exiles who would compete for scarce jobs and increase the influence of the United States in Cuba.⁴⁰

In accordance with the theories of Huntington and Dunlap, Cuba's military will continue to deteriorate as a fighting force unless it returns to its primary occupation of warfighting and limits its role in the economic and social arenas. This will directly affect its ability to combat a

foreign aggressor, but more significantly, its capability and willingness to deal with domestic dissent if such a situation should develop. This problem will only be further exacerbated if the armed forces continues its deep involvement with economic and social projects.

Cuban military officers do not want to be put into a situation in which they would be called on to fight the populace.⁴¹ The military has never met the requirements of the Huntington model in the sense of being isolated from the general population. On the contrary, for most of the period since 1959 the armed forces have not only worked closely with the people, but have drawn much of their membership from the poor and working classes.⁴² They also do not want to see massive disorder that might prompt the United States to invade. In their view, if this happens and the exiles return to power, everything they have gained during the Castro years will be lost.⁴³

What this means is that any radical measure on the part of Castro to either move too fast with economic liberalism, significantly widening the disparity between the haves and have-nots, or dramatically reverse economic changes already enacted, causing massive poverty and dissension, might possibly result in the military's abandoning support for the regime. Slow, gradual changes are likely to minimize the chance of widespread disorder and improve the economy to the degree that the military should see some small gains.⁴⁴ The question is whether it will be satisfied with this? No doubt Cuban officers would like a return to the early to mid-1980s when they had a viable mission, extensive forces, money, equipment, and world-wide prestige as a fighting force. But what choice do they have? The alternatives risk internal rebellion and possible intervention by the United States.⁴⁵

What if Castro leaves the scene? Such a scenario, assuming it doesn't result in US intervention, could enhance the status of the military. No other person or group has the charisma that Fidel has with the people. Whoever eventually takes over after Castro will be dependent on support from the armed forces. As it stands today, with the military involved in the economic, political and social foundations of society, any new leader might not be able to function without this backing.⁴⁶

What if the military assumes power, either by peaceful or violent means? This is probably unlikely. While a situation might develop where it was forced to seize power, in all likelihood the military would turn the government back over to civilians as soon as possible. We saw in the early 1960s what happened when military officers were put in a position where they had to assume the responsibilities of administering the state in addition to their regular duties. They spread themselves too thin, resulting in confusion about their proper role and a loss of military preparedness.

What scenario would threaten the military the least, while enhancing its status and allowing it to once again increase its capability as a warfighting force? With or without Castro, a regime that gradually implemented market economic changes would result in a better way of life for society as a whole. Sooner or later, these benefits would be extended to the military as well. A limited rapprochement with the United States would open up even more economic possibilities. While it would reduce the likelihood of a United States threat and remove the only viable mission the military currently has, there would be other opportunities. Joint military exercises and regional security participation within the OAS might be a possibility. If Cuba could democratize, peacekeeping missions within the UN structure might also be a possibility.

In summary, the only scenario that would maintain the status quo in the Cuban civil-military relationship or actually improve it would be a gradual move toward a western market economy. This would probably result in increased resources for military training and preparedness. Additionally, the military might be able to gradually extract themselves somewhat from the civilian economic and social sectors (Janowitz model) and spend more time improving military proficiency (Moskos model). This would go a long way towards restoring the effectiveness of the military as a warfighting force. At the same time, rapprochement with the United States would increase economic opportunities for the military, and training exercises and UN/regional security missions might replace defense against a US invasion as its professional mission.

CONCLUSION

Since 1959, we have seen the pendulum swing between both sides of the civil-military spectrum. In the aftermath of the overthrow of the Batista dictatorship, Cuban military leaders assumed managerial and political positions and directed the Revolutionary Armed Forces to participate in civilian industries while embryonic political organizations began to slowly develop. By the mid-1960s, military professionalism was declining, and relations between the civilian political organizations and the military were becoming troubled. By 1970, there was much confusion over the role of the military in relation to the political organizations, which had now matured and were ready to assume more functions regarding the administration of the state. In trying to maintain some semblance of military responsibility in conjunction with its administrative functions, the military fell short of the economic goals laid out by Castro.

Subsequently, roles once again became more clearly defined. The mid-1970s to mid-1980s saw the military at the height of its professionalism. Its roles in domestic political and economic spheres were reduced (though never eliminated), and it vastly expanded its operations into the international arena. During this period, Cuba supported wars of national liberation, sent thousands of military advisors to many nations and attempted to export the Cuban Communist Revolution while building up its military arsenal with modern Soviet equipment and training.

By the early 1990s, with the Cuban economy in a shambles, the military was once again heavily integrated into the social and economic arena to the detriment of military professionalism. Morale was low and dissatisfaction was rising among the populace as recently discharged military personnel competed for scarce jobs and resources.

Based on the theories presented earlier and the historical events that have been analyzed in terms of those constructs, it would seem that there is only one way to improve civil-military relations in Cuba. The economy must be strengthened to the point where the military can reduce its involvement in the economic and social sector and spend more time building its military capability and proficiency. This will probably only happen if the government embarks on the path of democratization, and the United States, regional organizations, and world-wide financial institutions respond in kind to Cuba's needs with investment opportunities and loans.

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